

Communication: Tips to Help with Teens

A recent survey on teens shows that a large majority of them want a closer relationship with their parents. They are often concerned about parental reactions and opinions and wish for better communication with their parents. In the U.S., many teens who were surveyed say that they often don't feel comfortable talking with their parents about real problems and concerns. At the same time, parents often express that they want to learn better ways to communicate with their children. Open, effective communication benefits not only the children, but every member of the family. Relationships between parents and their children are greatly improved when there is effective communication taking place. In general, if communication between parents and their children is good, then their relationships are good as well. More specifically, some researchers believe that solid communication between parents and their teen is the anti-violence and the anti-drug for many teenagers. In fact, the American Psychological Association's (APA) parent communication movement was an outgrowth of the youth anti-violence project.

Because this is a common concern of many parents and teenagers, the APA offers some tips for parents to communicate with their children. A summary of these tips for parents include:

Be available for your children

- Notice times when your kids are most likely to talk--for example, at bedtime, before dinner, in the car--and be available.
- Start the conversation; it lets your kids know you care about what's happening in their lives.
- Initiate conversations by sharing what you have been thinking about rather than beginning a conversation with a question.

Let your kids know you're listening

- When your children are talking about concerns, stop whatever you are doing and listen.
- Express interest in what they are saying without being intrusive.
- Listen to their point of view, even if it's difficult to hear.

Respond in a way your children will hear

- Soften strong reactions; kids will tune you out if you appear angry or defensive.
- Express your opinion without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it's okay to disagree.

Remember:

- Ask your children what they may want or need from you in a conversation, such as advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings, or help solving a problem.
- Kids learn by imitating. Most often, they will follow your lead in how they deal with anger, solve problems, and work through difficult feelings.
- Kids learn from their own choices. As long as the consequences are not dangerous, don't feel you have to step in.
- Realize your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering

them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk, and they may share the rest of the story.

- Control strong emotional responses when you disagree with your child's point of view. The APA tells parents, "Controlling this response is one of the biggest gifts you can give your child."

Parenting is hard work; maintaining a good connection with teens can be challenging, especially since parents are dealing with many other pressures. Listening and talking is the key to a healthy connection between you and your children. If you are having problems over an extended period of time, you might want to consider consulting with Behavioral Health Services, BG Sams US Army Health Clinic to find out how they can help, 263-4610.

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